

COLLEGE OF CONSUMER AND FAMILY SCIENCE
2006 EVA GOBLE LECTURE SERIES

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Dean Emerita

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Professors

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First and foremost, I would like to thank you for the invitation to be guest speaker at the 2006 Eva Goble Lecture. I am deeply honoured to be here and have the opportunity to meet Dean Emerita Eva Goble in person.

In its long history, a simple but powerful principle has driven the academic mission of Purdue University's College of Consumer and Family Science: to help improve the quality of life in Indiana, the nation and the world.

Everyday, graduates of Purdue fulfil that mission, using skills taught in this Faculty to help others less fortunate than themselves in various walks of life: from child development and health care to welfare services and policy-making. Locally and nationally, they work on the frontline dealing with critical issues that face individuals and families in modern-day society.

Today, I would like to take the opportunity to humbly suggest how graduates might work toward the third and most ambitious objective of their College's vision: changing the quality of life not just in the state of Indiana or even the United States but around the world.

As Executive Director of the World Food Programme, the United Nations food aid agency, I work on the frontline of one of the main challenges facing the global community in the 21st century: meeting the United Nations first Millennium Development Goal of halving the proportion of the world's hungry by 2015.

It's easy to forget that there are 852 million people in the world who know what it's like to go to bed hungry. Since Nobel Prize-winner Norman Borlaug, a visitor to Purdue earlier this year, pioneered the "Green Revolution" in the 1960s, the advanced world has taken comfort from the knowledge that, in quantitative terms, there is more

than enough food to feed the global population of 6.4 billion people. Despite this, the number of hungry people is growing by almost five million each year.

For most people, the only reminders are haunting images of acute hunger or starvation occasionally highlighted on our TV screens. In my five year tenure at WFP, the tragic sight of hungry mothers too weak to breastfeed their children or war refugees lining up for food rations has sadly become all too familiar. But natural or man-made disasters like this year's drought in Northeast Kenya or the Lebanon conflict, are the tip of the iceberg. They account for just eight percent of hunger's victims.

Daily undernourishment is far less visible – but it affects many more people, from the squalid shanty towns of Jakarta in Indonesia to the remote, mountain villages of Bolivia and Nepal. The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the world's worst natural disaster in decades, killed 250,000 people; undernourishment and malnutrition claim the same number of lives each 10 days, more than AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined, making hunger the number one risk to health worldwide.

The hungry die because they did not have enough to eat yesterday; they do not have enough to eat today; and will not have enough to eat tomorrow. It does not have to be so. Even after the United States total 300 million people have met their daily nutritional requirements, there is sufficient food left over to feed everyone of the 203 million hungry people in Africa. With our annual Thanksgiving celebrations a few days away, that's a sobering thought.

For months, the forgotten victims of hunger must live on significantly less than the recommended minimum 2100 kilocalories per day – equivalent to a cheese burger, chips, large drink and ice cream in a fast food chain. Their bodies slow down to compensate for the lack of energy and their minds struggle to concentrate. Tragically, this limits the individual's ability to make the most of opportunities to escape poverty, with a devastating impact on a country's economic development and, tragically, a poor family's only hope for a better future: their children.

We estimate that there are 400 million children who struggle to get enough to eat. With remorseless cruelty, 18,000 of them die every day – that's one child every five

seconds - too weak to fend off a common cold: the same simple infection that we often describe as 'good' for our babies because it creates antibodies that will guard them against later, tougher examinations of their health. This is how hunger and malnutrition kill.

Of course, these are just numbers and can never speak louder than holding an acutely malnourished child in your own arms. Few experiences have changed my life more than picking-up a hungry Kenyan baby earlier this year. Her tiny, frail body weighed little more than an average newborn child in the United States but she was already a year-old.

With several food scientists in the audience this evening, experts in how food influences the health of people, I don't need to emphasise how much the scales are tipped against the world's hungry children even before they are born. A child quite literally inherits hunger from a malnourished mother. Up to 20 million kids are born underweight annually because of their mother's inadequate nutrition before and during pregnancy.

And that's just the beginning. Even after they are born, millions of children from the world's poorest families do not get enough essential vitamins and minerals for healthy growth – with devastating consequences. Take the story of four-year-old Marie Carmel in Haiti. Her black curly hair is tinged with red, a tell-tale sign of malnutrition. Her eyes are empty because four months ago a chronic lack of vitamin A left her completely blind.

Vitamin A deficiency is the single greatest cause of blindness among children. It also increases the risk that they will die from diarrhoea, measles or malaria. In young children, zinc deficiency contributes to growth failure and weakened immunity; it results in some 800,000 child deaths per year. More than half of all pregnant women and school age children in the developing world suffer from iron deficiency. It increases the risk that mothers and infants bleed to death during childbirth. It weakens the body, saps energy and dulls alertness, making it hard for people to work, earn wages and feed their families.

If you were diagnosed with anaemia, we'd eat a big steak or take an iron supplement. That's just not possible for most of the people WFP works with, even though most of them have nothing other than their own labour with which to make a living. And hunger begets poverty every bit as much as poverty begets hunger. Think about it – you need to hire some labour to work on your farm. Who do you employ? The fellow who looks physically fit and strong or the scrawny and listless? So the stronger get the work and the hungry get hungrier.

Last but not least, iodine deficiency is the most common cause of mental retardation and brain damage in children. Lack of iodine can reduce a child's IQ by up to 15 points, meaning he or she is playing catch-up even before starting school or contemplating higher education.

Add to that, the fact that many millions of the poorest children will probably not go to school at all because their families need every hand at home just to put enough food on the family dinner table. Chances are that those who do go will be more focused on when the next meal is coming rather than on what their teachers are telling them. With their best chance to escape poverty diminished, the potential of another generation is lost – their lives condemned to poverty and ignorance.

Purdue University lists child development and early childhood education among the subjects on its syllabus, so I know I'm preaching to the converted when I state that there can be no excuse – social, political or economic – for children to go hungry and, as a consequence, fail to fulfil their learning potential -- not least because both are fundamental to achieving those elusive UN Millennium Development Goals.

Think about it. Knowledgeable minds and well nourished bodies are key to a better future. With good nutrition people can fight disease and infection better; they can survive to care for their children and pass their own skills and knowledge on to them. Healthy mothers give birth to healthy babies. And when people aren't worrying every minute about where their next meal will come from, they can start to think about other things—like their education.

Children with some degree of schooling—particularly girls—have substantially more opportunities. Educated girls tend to marry later, give birth to healthier babies, wait longer between pregnancies and enter the work force. They are aware of the importance of breastfeeding, immunization, hygiene and health checks for themselves and their family members. And educated mothers, in turn, are more likely to send their own children to school—changing the course of their community’s future.

It’s for this reason that WFP’s efforts to eradicate hunger start with its youngest victims at school. And despite all evidence to the contrary, believe me, child hunger can be conquered. We’ve done the maths.

Our studies show that for roughly US\$5 billion a year, WFP can reach the estimated 109 million children and pregnant women at risk of delivering malnourished babies who are not currently reached by governments or international assistance. US\$5 billion may seem a lot, but it’s made up of some very manageable parts. For as little as US\$34 per child per year, our school feeding programme provides free lunches that, first, encourage parents to send their kids to school and second, ensure that when they get there, they have the energy to focus on their lessons. Last year, I am proud to say, WFP school meals reached more than 21 million children in 74 countries.

Of course, we can’t do it alone, so working closely with UNICEF, we have teamed up with the widest possible group of partners to improve the benefit package offered to poor children through their local education system. In schools where WFP has school feeding programmes, we offer an essential health and nutrition package: the provision of toilets, vitamin and mineral supplements, teacher training, safe drinking water, HIV/AIDS prevention and mosquito nets to prevent malaria.

We hope that many developing countries where these programmes run will be able to provide the food needed to meet their own children and women’s needs – at a global value of just under US\$2 billion. The rest would need to come from other sources – which is where I believe Universities like Purdue can and are helping in two ways: first, through the famous activism of your students; second, by focusing some of your research and study funds on solutions to the child hunger problem.

Let's start with the students. Many people face a great hurdle when they consider major issues like hunger and poverty. I'm just one person, they think; what can I do? But the truth is that even the smallest gesture can have a great impact, and one person can make a difference – even if it's raising awareness not funds.

Let me give you an example. A few weeks ago, an article in the West Lafayette's Journal and Courier caught my eye. It described how the Department of Child Services has recently received an extra US\$8 million to help cope with the growing numbers of abandoned children needing care in Tippecanoe County. Now, this sudden rise was not down to a spate of families abandoning their children in Tippecanoe but simply what the article described as “a heightened public attention” to the issue.

WFP's “Universities Fighting World Hunger” campaign aims to draw on student activism across the United States to heighten local attention to international hunger. Participants are encouraged to adopt a variety of initiatives, including campus and community anti-hunger campaigns, fundraising events and letter-writing appeals to elected officials, corporate and civic leaders. Purdue students have already played their part, organising a Hunger Hike and a Hunger Banquet that has successfully shifted a global campaign out of the domain of international politics and straight into the classrooms of university students. I can think of no better example of the kind of grassroots activism that one Purdue student once described as “my schooling, my university”.

Let's focus on Faculty. I am convinced that our universities contain some of the people who can help us conquer hunger – and Purdue University is no exception. In terms of pushing back the envelope on food science, WFP and Purdue already share common ground. Like Purdue's College of Food Science, WFP has its own Nutrition Unit, responsible for making sure we give the right food rations to the right people in the right place. And like your College, our nutritionists have made great advances in the field of food science, or, more specifically, food aid.

In its relatively short 40-year life, WFP has become a world leader in providing micronutrient-fortified food aid to people in the world's poorest countries. We ask our donors to ensure that all donations of salt are iodised and that vegetable oils, a key

component of our food ration, are fortified with vitamin A and vitamin D. Today, WFP's fortified food reaches 700,000 infants in therapeutic feeding programmes and over three million children in supplementary feeding programmes. We are the world's biggest purchaser of micronutrient fortified blended foods – used in supplementary feeding of malnourished children and mothers. We are also a leader in the helping poor countries like Bangladesh, Senegal and Malawi – produce their own blended foods.

Purdue University also numbers several professors whose research is helping fight hunger. Allow me to single out the work of Bruce Hamaker, a professor at the College of Food Science. Bruce and his team of researchers are working on finding ways of better utilizing sorghum and millet in Africa, both in terms of their nutritional and food qualities. They have already identified a highly digestible sorghum genotype and have developed methods to quickly identify this trait for breeders.

I appeal to you to look for further opportunities to focus your department's research on projects that have the potential to rid the world of mankind's oldest enemy and, potentially, improve the quality of life of millions of people.

We can take hope from both the past and the present. A quarter of a century ago, the eradication of polio must have seemed a daunting task, but 25 years later, the campaign to rid the world of this dreadful disease has almost reached its goal. Likewise, in both post-war Europe and Japan, and in developing countries like Chile, Thailand and China, we have concrete examples of hunger among children being dramatically reduced thanks to political commitment and coordinated action.

And then there is the case of Marie Carmel, the blind Haitian girl I mentioned earlier. Today, she and her mother survive on our organisation's monthly rations of rice, beans, oil and iodized salt, handed out at a health centre north of Port-au-Prince. Our help won't give Marie her sight back – but it will ensure that the day she starts a family of her own, her children will be able to look forward to a brighter, healthier future.